

My Birth Story

(The writing in italics is my thoughts at the time.)

On arrival at the labour ward, I was 'assessed' by a midwife as not being in established labour and she was fairly sure she'd be sending me home. *Well if this isn't labour, I certainly don't want to go through a real one and I now feel like a naughty child being told off for coming to hospital too early* (something which I was determined I wasn't going to do). She humoured me though and examined me. *That's a relief, I'm 4cm dilated and allowed to stay and more importantly to have some gas and air.* She then went off duty and the day shift started. All credit to this midwife though as when she came back on duty that night, and heard that my baby had been born less than 4 hours later, she came up to the postnatal ward to apologise to me for her initial judgement.

The day shift midwife took over my care and I continued to puff on the entonox like it was going out of fashion. I remember saying 'I need to push' so the midwife examined me again and said she needed to get the midwife in charge to come and see me. *Oh no, what's the matter, it's going wrong already.* The midwife in charge examined me and said I was in fact fully dilated apart from a little bit and would I like to have my waters broken. *I don't know, you're the midwife.* I said that I just wanted them to do whatever was best for the baby. They decided to leave it for now.

I was then allowed to go in the birthing pool. Using the pool and not having an epidural was the nearest I'd got to having a birth plan but I wasn't too bothered. I wallowed about in the pool and started on my second large cylinder of gas and air. I can remember the midwife making comments about how long I'd been in the pushing stage and that I was coming up towards the hour that was allowed before the doctor has to be involved. *Doctors and birth means C-section and I'm not ready for that. Panic, I need to get this baby out.*

I was taken out to the bathroom to try and pee. I couldn't so this meant I had to be catheterised. *People don't pee when they're severely dehydrated and really poorly. I need a catheter, they seem really concerned that I haven't pee'd. This isn't going well, I'm not doing what I'm supposed to be doing. If everything was ok, I'd be able to pee.* By this time I was lying on the floor in the pool room. I hadn't really planned to be giving birth lying flat on my back on the floor.

The baby's heart rate dropped. *Mutterings between the midwives. It sounds really slow. They look worried.* I remember looking at my husband with a look of terror. *Oh my goodness the baby's going to die.* I was being told that the baby's getting tired now, we need to get her out. *Oh my goodness, it's going to die and it'll be my fault, I need to push it out now.*

The midwife in charge arrives, my legs are up in the air with a midwife pushing against each leg, *Panic, panic, panic.* I push like my baby's life depends on it and our gorgeous daughter is born.

Our baby was put on my chest and covered in a towel. *This is what we've been waiting for. Thank you that she's ok.* Then the midwife lifted up the towel and said

where's all that blood coming from? *How cruel, we've got our perfect baby and now I'm going to bleed to death. She's going to be left without a mummy. The 2 of them will be on their own. I've been so selfish to put them through this.*

More midwives came flying in. I heard our midwife say I should have called the Registrar sooner. *Registrar? That's who you call when things are bad. And she says she should have called them sooner. It's too late. Is anyone in control? Does anyone know what's happening? Am I bleeding to death on the floor? Why isn't anyone checking my blood pressure and getting some fluid into me?*

I somehow ended up in a wheelchair and being taken to a bed in the room next door. The Registrar examined me and a cannula was put in my arm and a syntocinon drip started. Our midwife was going to practise her suturing on me but she and the midwife who was going to supervise her asked another midwife to come and have a go. She couldn't do it either, the doctor was going to have to. *What sort of a mess is it down there if the midwives can't put it back together?* The Registrar put some local anaesthetic in but said she couldn't anaesthetise all of it so a few of the stitches were incredibly painful.

My husband was somewhere with our baby girl but she had been whisked away before I was carted off in a wheelchair. I asked the midwife to go and tell him that I was ok as I knew he would be worrying. He told me afterwards that he hadn't been told anything until that point so was left thinking the worst.

We were finally all reunited and I breastfed our little baby for the first time.

We were taken up to the postnatal ward and once I was settled, My husband went home. Our baby stayed asleep and I just watched her. When the night staff arrived, they seemed horrified that I hadn't fed her again yet. *I've starved my baby and she's only a few hours old, what a terrible mother.*

I cried all night but I don't think anyone noticed. I felt overwhelmed and alone and too scared to go to sleep in case I didn't wake up.

My birth story is actually an account of a very normal, uncomplicated labour but my feelings around it were quite different. I am certain that if the manner and comments of the midwives had been different and I had been provided with clear information about what was happening, and reassurance, then I would have felt very differently. Eighteen months later, when our second child was born, I suffered from what was diagnosed as severe postnatal depression and anxiety. It would now seem that what I was in fact suffering from was post traumatic stress from my first birth which only came to the surface when I was six months pregnant for the second time. After much therapy and medication, I am now well on the road to recovery. However, a sadness still remains that I have been unwell for so much of my children's lives, and that things could have maybe been so different if my first birth had been handled differently. If nothing else, I hope that my story shows midwives and other healthcare professionals, how much of an impact they and in particular their communication can have on someone.